

**end of year review**

**venture trust in south west  
scotland cja**

**venture trust**

**2010/11**

Venture Trust, 6D Bruntfield Terrace (Rear Building), Edinburgh EH10 4EX.  
Tel: +44 (0)131 228 7700 / Fax: +44 (0)131 228 7701

Email: [info@venturetrust.org.uk](mailto:info@venturetrust.org.uk) / Web: [www.venturetrust.org.uk](http://www.venturetrust.org.uk)

Registered office: Lion House, Red Lion Street, London WC1R 4GB.

Charity No. In Scotland: SC038932 / Charity No. In England & Wales: 285891 Company No. 1673720

## end of year review

# personal development programmes for young people in the criminal justice system

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## overview

**Venture Trust believes in people.** We believe that people who, because of their life experiences, have become marginalised and vulnerable and are living chaotic lifestyles have the capacity to change, and can be supported to take responsibility for their lives. Venture Trust helps people recognise what they need to change; then gives them the confidence, motivation and life skills they need to make those changes.

At the heart of all our programmes, we give people time, space and support in a wilderness setting, far away from the pressures of home, where physical, emotional and social challenges take them into a personal 'stretch' zone where powerful learning can happen.

## wilderness-based personal development: aims and rationale

Venture Trust's personal development programmes are based on the understanding that the wilderness is naturally conducive to reflection, learning, challenge and discussion. The contrast of the outstanding natural landscapes of the Highlands of Scotland with participants' (predominantly urban) home environments gives young people a **chance to take a step back** from their circumstances and really concentrate on the changes they want to make in their lives.

In these wilderness environments, actions (and their consequences) are magnified. Overlooking details when planning an expedition could make for a long and frustrating day, whilst making compromises to accommodate individuals' needs creates a more positive and successful atmosphere for the whole group. When participants work together and individually to tackle the **social, emotional and physical challenges** set by Venture Trust, they also begin to realise the importance of planning ahead, taking responsibility, and accepting the consequences of their actions.

Venture Trust courses introduce, test and reinforce concepts and lifeskills such as establishing trust, safe spaces, personal boundaries, problem solving, consequential thinking, barriers to change, setting, reviewing and revising goals and giving and receiving feedback. Each activity is designed to help participants to work toward **key outcomes**, relating to reducing offending behaviour, increasing their confidence, stability and employability, improving their bonds with their community and making increased use of local services, and working towards positive destinations in education, training, employment and voluntary work. The skills developed during the intensive wilderness learning experiences are supported and developed by our Outreach team who work with participants in their home communities.



*Regular one-to-one sessions during wilderness expeditions allow participants the opportunity to objectively discuss the issues in their lives, in a safe, constructive and open environment.*

## national support for young offenders

In 2010/11 Venture Trust's '**Living Wild: Chance for Change**' programme supported 96 young people (aged 16-25) on probation throughout Scotland who had committed to making positive changes in their lives and reduce offending behaviour. The programme is primarily funded by the Scottish Government's Justice Directorate, with additional support from the European Social Fund and a small number of UK trusts & foundations.

The programme, which has been the cornerstone of Venture Trust's work with young offenders for more than a decade, provides 12-15 months of personal development support, including intensive wilderness journeys in northern Scotland. Venture Trust's Outreach Team provides 'community links' support following the wilderness journey, signposting participants into local opportunities and services, including voluntary projects, employment, education and training opportunities.

The programme is proven to enable participants to **reduce the risks of being re-convicted**, sustain and increase their self-confidence, increase their employability, improve their bonds with the wider community, make increased use of services and opportunities within communities, and to help them access employment, education and training opportunities. Outcomes achieved by participants from 2010/11 '**Living Wild: Chance for Change**' courses are showing strong developmental outcomes at the most recent monitoring point:

- 92% are showing increased self-confidence
- 93% are showing increased employability
- 68% are showing behaviours and circumstances likely to reduce risks of reconviction
- 78% are improving bonds with community members
- 68% are making increased use of community services and opportunities
- 39% have progressed into a positive destination –employment, education or training

During 2010 Venture Trust extensively developed and refined the programme in anticipation of the introduction of the new CPO disposal, to ensure that the programme fully complements the conditions of the new order and will maintain its accessibility and efficacy under the new system. Attention has also been given to ensuring that we maintain existing systems and details designed to support the old probation order during the transition period.

We anticipate regularly reviewing the needs of both young people involved in offending and the sentencing courts in Scotland to ensure that the programme provides the most effective and practical intervention possible for the criminal justice system.



*Venture Trust's programmes are based on the understanding that the wilderness is naturally conducive to reflection, learning, challenge and discussion.*

## venture trust in south west scotland

'Living Wild: Chance for Change' has once again formed a major part of the availability of personal development services for young people on probation in the CJA. In 2010/11 Venture Trust received 254 referrals to this programme from across Scotland, of whom **43 came from South West Scotland CJA (up from 34 in 2009/10)**. Young people from the area who completed a wilderness journey on the programme achieved outstanding outcomes during the last financial year, at most recent monitoring points:

- 83% are showing increased self-confidence
- 67% are showing increased employability
- 58% are showing behaviours and circumstances likely to reduce risks of reconviction
- 75% are sustaining or improving bonds with community members
- 50% are sustaining or increasing their use of community services and opportunities
- 33% have progressed into a positive destination – employment, education or training

### **Case Studies: Changes in outlook for young offenders in South West Scotland**

**Lisa\***, 19, was referred to Venture Trust following a charge of assault when she was heavily under the influence of alcohol. She lived in a chaotic home environment and had a volatile relationship with her parents, grandparents and siblings, whose issues with alcohol significantly affected her ability to move forward with her life. She was additionally hampered by health issues and believed that she would be unable to maintain any permanent employment or continue education.

Lisa was initially not keen to engage with the programme and reluctant to talk about her personal life. She had no aspirations to enter employment or return to education, and could see few opportunities for her future. However, after meeting with a Venture Trust outreach worker on several occasions, she started to open up about her circumstances and what she wanted to change. She agreed to participate in a wilderness journey in April 2010, which she found challenging but successfully completed. Her one-to-one worker noted that at the start of the course Lisa disengaged in challenges when they became too difficult as she was easily frustrated, but recognised this as an area to work on. During the main expedition she challenged herself to finish the walk without getting worked up or frustrated, breaking the task into workable strategies which she was able to accomplish to great success.

Lisa returned home where she started regularly engaging with a Community Links worker. Lisa identified that her home environment was hampering her development, so her Community Links worker helped her to apply for, secure and sustain her own tenancy. She also found other third sector services which she was interested in, and went on to participate in a course with Venture Scotland, before joining the Prince's Trust to complete a qualification in youth work. After the success of her engagement with Venture Scotland, Lisa was invited to return to another course as a volunteer, supporting participants through their programme.

On the strength of her volunteering role, the qualifications she gained from the Prince's Trust and the initial work she undertook with Venture Trust, Lisa was offered a full-time job with Venture Scotland. For a young person who initially couldn't conceive the idea of full-time employment, this represents an enormous step towards a sustainable lifestyle.

**Tony\***, 24, was a prolific offender who had spent five years in and out of Young Offenders' Institutions for a variety of convictions. At the point of his referral to Venture Trust, he was nearing the end of his latest probation order, and had identified that he needed to make changes in his life as his behaviour was damaging and unsustainable. He needed support to make those changes, in particular because he lacked much direction or any clear goals in his life.

Tony engaged very positively both with the outreach and wilderness elements of the programme and began a wilderness journey in June 2010. However, halfway through the expedition Tony learned that someone had turned up to his mother's house looking for him, armed with a shotgun. He later told his outreach worker that his normal reaction would have been to immediately return home and retaliate to the confrontation, most likely with violence. Having already recognised this negative pattern of behaviour with support from Venture Trust, Tony instead chose to stay on the wilderness journey and complete the duration of the wilderness phase.

On completing the wilderness journey and receiving a very positive report, Tony went on to engage with Venture Trust's Community Links worker for an extended period. He identified a training course he was interested in pursuing, studying sport and exercise at James Watt College. Tony applied for and was offered a place - a huge developmental step for a young man who previously had no aspirations to enter further education, nor any real sense of direction for his life. He has not offended since he started engaging with Venture Trust.

*\*names have been changed.*

The **'Making Tracks: Turnaround'** programme, delivered in partnership with Apex Scotland and Turning Point Scotland, has worked with young high volume, low tariff male offenders aged 16-35, especially those vulnerable to substance misuse, mental health issues and homelessness to significantly reduce their re-offending rates. During 2010/11, the programme was exclusively available to the South West Scotland and North Strathclyde CJA areas. As in previous years, the majority of participants were referred because they were failing in other community-based sentences or have experienced multiple remand or short-term custodial sentences. Participants initially work with Turning Point Scotland to enhance their stability, before engaging with Venture Trust's Outreach team and then taking part in a Venture Trust wilderness journey.

The 16 young men who took part in the Turnaround programme have made and sustained significant positive outcomes:

- 90% are showing increased self-confidence.
- 95% are showing increased employability.
- 75% are showing behaviours and circumstances likely to reduce risks of reconviction.
- 59% are improving bonds with community members
- 49% are making increased use of community services and opportunities.
- 19% have progressed into employment, education, training or volunteering positions.

## women in the criminal justice system

Venture Trust has recently broadened its course availability to address a particular need for programmes focussed on women involved in offending, who often have different backgrounds, circumstances and needs to their male counterparts.

Following an extremely successful pilot programme during 2010 in partnership with The Willow Project in Edinburgh, our provision for vulnerable women, '**Next Steps**', has now been established as a full programme, funded by Comic Relief's Sport for Change fund, with additional elements supported by the Rank Foundation. The programme will offer support to up to 48 women in 2011/12, targeting key outcomes of reducing offending behaviour and increasing employability.



*Female-centred and female-led courses allow structure and content to be tailored towards specific needs.*

We are very keen to develop this programme further and expand our provision for this group within South West Scotland, and as such we are eager to work with the CJA to explore how we can develop support structures for female offenders in the area.

## early intervention, preventative and diversionary work

Venture Trust works with a range of '**More Choices More Chances**' (MCMC) groups in Scotland, with a particular focus on young people whose backgrounds and life circumstances render them at risk of offending. Very often the groups targeted by our MCMC programmes come from families or care environments where they are exposed to offending and long-term unemployment, such that the young person's prospect for a successful transition to adulthood is severely impaired, and they are much more likely to become involved in offending than their peers.

In 2010/11 Venture Trust's '**Inspiring Young Futures**' programme supported 191 young carers and young care leavers from North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and six other Local Authorities in Scotland. Of those young people who engaged with the programme **20 were referred from East and North Ayrshire-based organisations.**



*Expeditions over land, sea or loch, in all conditions, give participants the opportunity to tackle significant challenges in a safe and supportive environment.*

Young people who have been in care remain amongst the most likely to be involved in offending, as the following UK-wide statistics illustrate:

- 30% of children in custody have been in care.
- 23% of the adult prison population have been in care; even though looked after children make up less than 1% of the population.
- Children who have been in care account for 49% of the under-21 year olds in contact with the criminal justice system.

Venture Trust's programme for this client group offers outreach and in-community support including one- or two-day wilderness experiences, building up to a seven-day wilderness journey at our residential centre in Applecross, which is then followed by extensive 'Community Links' support. The programme provides early intervention and preventative support to build confidence, motivation, employability and a range of vital lifeskills, to help participants **avoid negative choices, influences and situations**.

*"It has showed me that I can do anything if I put my mind to it and has gave me a more positive outlook in life! Everything you learn you can take back home and use in your day to day life. No matter what your personal issues are, this course will show you the way forward! No one will do it for you but the support is there to help you achieve your goals what ever they may be!!!"*

'Inspiring Young Futures' participant, 2010

The 191 young people who engaged with the **'Inspiring Young Futures'** programme have made excellent progress against our interim targets:

- 83% are showing increased self-confidence (target 50%)
- 81% are showing increased employability (target 50%)
- 51% are showing increased stability (target 40%)
- 91% are improving bonds with community members (target 50%)
- 93% are making increased use of community services and opportunities (target 50%)

Most pleasingly, 130 young people engaging with the programme entered a positive destination during the year (though many started working with Venture Trust in the previous financial year).

### **developments for 2011/12**

For the 2011/12 financial year, Venture Trust has **developed and expanded the 'Living Wild: Chance for Change' programme** to enable a much greater number of young people on probation in Scotland to access the service. Venture Trust has made 168 places available on the programme (up from 96 in previous years), and has increased outreach provision accordingly.

The **increase in outreach capacity**, including a wider geographic spread of members of staff, will ensure that each individual participant who accesses the programme will have even more contact with their outreach worker before and after their wilderness journey, which we anticipate will have a very positive impact on our targeted outcomes.

Additionally, Venture Trust has revised the eligible age range for participation in the programme upwards, such that **we can now accept referrals for young people aged 16-30** (increased from the previous upper age limit of 25). This revision is intended to avoid situations where a candidate meeting all other conditions for participation is excluded on grounds of being slightly older than 25, as well as recognising that levels of maturity vary significantly across those on CPO/probation such that apparently older participants may need similar support to those who are younger. Additionally, an increase in the age range stems from our experience that some older participants, by virtue of their life experience, are more strongly motivated to change, can articulate why they've reached that stage to younger participants, and hence their motivation has a positive influence on younger participants.

As in previous years, we expect the majority of referrals will continue to be in the age range 16-21, particularly given that existing referrers will remain the foundation of the referral process.

Venture Trust is additionally developing further partnerships with third sector organisations in England & Wales, to reach a greater number of vulnerable young people struggling with challenging life circumstances. We anticipate making a significant nationwide impact based on the learning we have gathered from our long-term work in Scotland.

### **conclusions**

Venture Trust has recorded yet another very successful year as a partner to the criminal justice system in Scotland. We are confident that the changes we have made to the **'Living Wild: Chance for Change'** programme have assured the effectiveness and appropriateness of our service in the medium-term, and look forward to working with Criminal Justice teams and CJAs as the new CPO disposal beds in.

As ever, we welcome comments or enquiries from representatives of the CJA, and in particular we are always interested in exploring new ways in which we can best meet the needs of the CJA and individuals, families and communities in South West Scotland.